

# The Reformation was a European movement

Scandinavia did not undergo as radical a change in the Reformation as did Germany. In Sweden, Catholic bishops simply changed confessions, as **Stephanie Dietrich** explained in an interview with **Silke Römhild**. The two spoke just before the 2012 EKD Synod meeting at Timmendorfer Strand.

**You are German, but have lived in Norway for many years and work there for the Norwegian church. How did this all happen?**

When I was 21, I wanted to go abroad for a year. I studied in Neuendettelsau, which offered an exchange program with Oslo. And I liked it there a lot. At the time, career opportunities for theologians in Germany were rather limited. In Norway, on the other hand, at some point the bishop in charge of the church approached me to tell me that things were different there and that I was very welcome to serve in the Norwegian church. And so I took the exam there and stayed on. I worked, among other things, as an assistant at the MF Norwegian School of Theology, in the external office of the Church of Norway in charge of ecumenical affairs, and have now been at the Faculty for Diaconal Studies for four years.

**You are a member of the Synod preparatory committee on the central topic of “Perspectives on the 2017 Reformation Jubilee”. How have you been following the preparations underway here in Germany from a Norwegian perspective?**

It is interesting for me to see how central and important the Reformation event and jubilee are in Germany. It is impressive to see the enthusiasm put into the preparations! At the same time, I sometimes have had the impression that people are perhaps not always aware of the fact that the Reformation was a European movement that did not only take place in Germany or center solely on Martin Luther's reformative discoveries. There were reformations all throughout Europe in countries such as Switzerland and France. There were in fact already

reform ideas within the Catholic Church of the time and in churches such as the Waldensian Church, even before the era of the great reformers. A great deal was “brewing” in terms of politics and the history of ideas. Germany is a very important country when it comes to the Reformation – but not the only one.

**What are your hopes for the 2012 EKD Synod?**

With its topic, the EKD Synod should bring about new impulses with regard to what it means today, as churches decisively influenced by the Reformation, to come together as a church time and again. I hope that the Synod members carry new impulses from the meeting back home to their congregations and to their various situations and contexts. What does it mean for a church to renew itself both in the Reformation era and today? Hopefully we will be able to make people aware that the Reformation entails ever renewing the relevance and viability of our churches, and not only preparing for a great celebration – as nice as that may be – but thinking about what it means for our lives together and for the community and society in Germany and around the world. How can we embody the church for each other and for the people around us today? What does it mean today to be the body of Jesus Christ here at the local level, in Europe, and throughout the entire world?

**In what other ways can the 2017 celebrations include the international perspective?**

A hundred years ago, Martin Luther was celebrated as a hero. This time around, we want to do things differently. We need to think about

how the Reformers struggled for the church to be the place on earth for the truth of the Gospel to reside. We have to honor this and we have to focus on what is ahead. What will it mean to be the Church of Jesus Christ in 100 or 120 years? What does it mean to embody the church for one another in the community? Today, the Gospel is proclaimed and shared both with and without words. I think that the diaconal witness is just as important for our churches as is the witness in proclamation. We have much to learn in that regard. And how do Christians treat each other around the world? The majority of the world's churches reside in the Global South, something that has not always been clear to us here in Europe. The celebration can therefore also remind us that the church has always had to change and evolve – back in the Reformation era and today.

**In Germany, people are discussing whether there should be a Reformation memorial or Reformation celebration. What do you think?**

I think it should be both! The Reformation was not as radical a change in Scandinavia as it was in Germany. Generally, the clergy were retrained for the Lutheran confession. In Sweden, for example, Catholic bishops just became Lutheran bishops. Norway and Denmark had Lutheran superintendents installed. This shows us that, while the Reformation entailed a fundamental renewal of the church, a certain continuity still prevailed. That is why there is such an awareness: We are the church in Norway, which, although decisively changed by the Reformation, is not a new church. This awareness does much to sustain us and of course also influences our understanding of the Reformation.

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**What can we in fact celebrate together in 2017?**

In 2017, we can celebrate the way the fathers and mothers of the Reformation preceded us in their search for truth and search for the renewal of the church – and how we can follow in their footsteps together. And we are searching for the answers to fundamental questions together. That is in fact a major topic in our preparations for the Reformation Jubilee as well: the liberating message of the Gospel, justification by faith alone. We see how we are confronted by exceedingly large demands in today’s world, whether placed on us by others or indeed by ourselves. This is where the message of justification is liberating, in that it says: You are not justified before God by what you do or what you have but because you belong to Jesus Christ. This frees

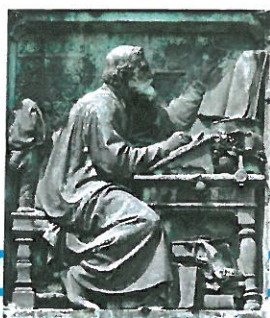
us to live, and to live successful lives. That is a dimension that we can transfer to today’s society well.

**We hope for consolation and answers from the church that people cannot provide themselves.**

Yes, the church can provide consolation. Norway was strongly affected last year by the terrorist attacks of July 22. The people were shaken to the core. The shock of the cold-blooded murder of so many young people hit hard and has made very clear how important solidarity and community are, and indeed common resistance to totalitarian thought and fundamentalism of any kind. For many people, the church was a place of refuge under these circumstances. Right after the terrorist attacks, people of all

denominations and even all religions gathered in and around Oslo Cathedral. That was the place to go. After July 22, embodying the church means standing together and consoling and bearing affliction together – all while prophetically advocating as Christians against injustice and for democracy. As the church of the Reformation, we can and should be doing both. ◀

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**1521  
DIET OF WORMS**

The Diet of Worms demanded that Luther recant his Theses. He refused, and asked that his Theses instead be refuted in writing and through reason, stating: “I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.” The Edict of Worms placed the imperial ban on Luther.

**1520  
THREE MAIN WRITINGS OF THE REFORMATION**

Martin Luther’s writings put an end to the distinction between laypeople and clerics as, in Luther’s view, all baptized Christians were members of the clerical estate. Luther also reduced the number of sacraments from seven to three: Baptism, the Eucharist, and Confession. Luther developed his doctrine of justification in *On the Freedom of a Christian*.

**1522  
SEPTEMBER TESTAMENT**

During his time at Wartburg Castle, where he took refuge from the pope’s persecution, Luther translated the New Testament, which became known popularly as the “September Testament”. The first practical reforms were implemented in Wittenberg, doing away with the celibacy requirement, mass services, and the veneration of images.